

**A BOURDIEUIAN ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' CHANGING DISPOSITIONS
TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE LIMITATIONS OF PRACTICUM PLACEMENTS
IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

As populations in contemporary Western societies grow increasingly diverse, preparing predominantly White middle class pre-service teachers to better understand and work with difference productively has become increasingly critical. Historically, however, teacher education programs have aimed to address diversity with add-on or piecemeal approaches, with little success. This article illustrates and theorises change in two Australian teachers' dispositions towards social justice over time from a Bourdieuan perspective. It attempts to inform our understanding of current pre-service teacher education program inadequacies with a view to providing implications in relation to the constraints of the limited and limiting nature of practicum placements. Fundamentally, its goal is to improve the preparedness of pre-service teachers to cater for diversity in socially just ways.

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INTRODUCTION

As populations in contemporary Western societies grow increasingly diverse, a daunting task is faced by teacher educators: preparing predominantly White middle class pre-service teachers to better understand and work with difference productively (Allard & Santoro, 2006; D'Cruz, 2007; Gay, 2010; Santoro, 2009). At the same time that the student population in Australia, for example, is becoming increasingly diverse, the pre-service teacher population is becoming more homogeneous (Allard & Santoro, 2004; 2006). Finding ways to improve the success of diverse students through our pre-service teacher preparation is integral in these times of increasing student diversity.

In this context, the need for issues of social justice and diversity to be central components of pre-service teacher education takes on particular significance. A review of literature on teacher education programs undertaken in the U.S., however, suggests that historically, teacher education programs have aimed to address diversity with add-on or piecemeal approaches, with little success (McDonald, 2005). The typical response of teacher education programs to the growing diversity among students in these contexts has been to add a course or two on multicultural education but leave the rest of the curriculum largely intact (Goodwin, 1997; Ambe, 2006). This is in spite of the fact that (i) research from the U.S. and Australia demonstrates that it is difficult to influence

long-held beliefs and attitudes in the space of one stand-alone course (McDiarmid, 1990; Mills, 2008; Mills & Ballantyne, 2010); and (ii) multiculturalism is not the only form of diversity present in schools.

Moreover, “one of the most formative experiences on pre-service teachers is anticipatory socialization for teaching during the 12 to 15 years they spend as pupils in classrooms” (Hatton, 1998, p. 7). This “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) appears to have a profound influence on the way teacher candidates view their own teaching practice (Frederick, Cave & Perencevich, 2010). Australian research by Sinclair, Munns and Woodward (2005) suggests that despite modern improvements to the practicum experiences, due to the limited time spent in schools, the limited scope of tasks undertaken by pre-service teachers and the haphazard organisation of practicum experiences in schools, these programs still fail to offset this prior socialisation.

Over three decades ago, U.S. researcher Lortie (1975) argued that in order to move towards change in beliefs, teacher education candidates must be provided with experiences that systematically offset their own personal experiences. This appears not to be common practice in Australian universities, where the majority of teacher education students have attended middle class, Anglo-Australian schools for their primary and secondary education and often find themselves in practicum placements not dissimilar from their personal schooling experiences (Allard & Santoro, 2006). Such placements contrast directly with recommendations of U.S. researchers Causey, Thomas and Armento (2000), who suggest that extensive field experiences in

diverse settings – alongside structured opportunities for reflection, self-analysis, and discourse on equity issues – are crucial in moving prospective teachers toward the confrontation and modification of prior beliefs through a provocation of cognitive dissonance. The research of Wiggins, Follo and Eberly (2007) echoes the benefits of intensive, long-term targeted field placements in diverse school contexts in improving the attitudes of U.S. pre-service teachers.

Recent U.S. research undertaken by Chubbuck (2010) also emphasises the particular importance of (i) diverse field placements; and (ii) teaming pre-service teachers in these placements with supervising teachers in schools as well as university supervisors who both model and support the equity pedagogy that socially just teaching requires. Darling-Hammond, Newton and Wei's (2010) research in the Stanford Teacher Education Programme similarly advocates overhauling student teaching placements to ensure that they are year-long in duration and that candidates are placed with expert cooperating teachers committed to strong equity-oriented practice with diverse learners.

Drawing on Gale and Densmore's (2000) conceptual framework on social justice and the theoretical work of Bourdieu (outlined in the theoretical framework section), what follows illustrates and theorises change in two teachers' dispositions towards social justice over time. Specifically, the article questions whether the progressively sophisticated dispositions towards student diversity – predominantly in relation to students' learning and behaviour in the classroom; aspects of diversity that they dealt with on a daily basis – that these teachers develop over time could be accelerated if the

nature of field experiences during pre-service teacher education were changed. It attempts to inform our understanding of current pre-service teacher education program inadequacies with a view to providing implications in relation to the constraints of the limited and limiting nature of practicum placements. Fundamentally, its goal is to improve the preparedness of pre-service teachers to cater for diversity, more broadly construed, in socially just ways.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data for this article is drawn from the first two years of a longitudinal study that explores changes in teachers' dispositions towards social justice over time; and the factors that appear to be critical in the development of socially just dispositions. The research involved interviews with 24 teachers drawn from two secondary education programs within an Australian metropolitan university. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the institution's Ethics Committee and participants gave informed consent. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with consenting participants up to four times across a two year period – over one year as pre-service teachers and over one year as beginning teachers – to elicit insights into their dispositions towards social justice at various points in time and enable the investigation of change. When the first round of interviews took place, 12 were beginning their Graduate Diploma in Education program (a one year program), while another 12 were beginning their final year of the Bachelor of Education program (a four year program) and had therefore completed three years of initial teacher education. The respective sample sizes represent approximately 10% of each secondary education cohort.

In Australia, teachers are required to complete a minimum of four years of study at the tertiary level, with at least one year engaged in teacher education courses. During this period, pre-service teachers undertake courses in their specialist teaching area/s, general courses informed by the sociology of education and educational psychology and practicum experiences. As Australia moves to national accreditation of initial teacher education programs, and with it, responsibility for approving pre-service programs based on whether their graduates meet the National Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011), the structure and content of programs across institutions is likely to share many similarities.

The Bachelor of Education, from which 12 of the research participants were drawn, is a four year full time program offered as a dual degree. The non-education degree provides content knowledge for two teaching areas, while the education degree provides skills and knowledge for teaching. During the first three years, students complete a number of education courses while satisfying the requirements for their first degree. In the fourth year students undertake professional studies including supervised practicum experiences in school settings alongside Graduate Diploma in Education students. The other 12 research participants were drawn from this Graduate Diploma program; a one-year teacher preparation program for students who already hold a degree providing content knowledge for their two specialist teaching areas.

Although both programs are marketed as encouraging the development of a personal theory of teaching that considers the role of teachers in the promotion of a socially just and inclusive society, they could be considered typical in terms of addressing diversity through “add-on or piecemeal approaches” (McDonald, 2005), demonstrated by the incorporation of stand-alone cultural diversity courses which leave the rest of the curriculum largely intact (Goodwin, 1997).

Given the overwhelming makeup of the pre-service teacher population in Australia, it is unsurprising that the majority of participants identified as Anglo-Australian and of middle class background. Only one participant spoke a Language Other Than English as their first language, and two did not identify as Australian citizens. Almost 90% of participants were female and 75% were in the 20-29 year age bracket at the time of the interviews. In terms of the range of experiences teachers brought to their pre-service teacher education, two-thirds were school leavers, while the other one-third had engaged in full time work prior to commencing their program. Despite the fact that participants are anonymised, they are always potentially identifiable at least to those involved, if not to wider audiences. Pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity and only basic background information pertinent to giving the reader a more rounded sense of interviewees has been included.

Of the 24 teachers who participated in the research, two have been selected as the focus of this article. These two teachers participated in all stages of the longitudinal research (four interviews over a two year period), enabling the analysis of change over

time. While they were not the only teachers who participated in the research in this way, they represent well the range of experiences as well as the dispositional change evident among the group. In addition, restricting the analysis to two teachers also makes possible a much deeper exploration of teachers' changing dispositions.

Given that dispositions are largely 'unspoken', the interviews provided forums for participants to 'speak' these dispositions. To do this, participants were prompted in ways that encouraged them to engage in reflexivity on their pedagogic work (as the activity in/through which socially just dispositions are identified). However, Bourdieuians see the need to problematise (i) the degree to which the testimony of research subjects is reliable; and (ii) the limits within which subjects can reflect adequately upon their own practice (Jenkins, 2002). Bourdieu seeks to overcome this opposition between "theoretical knowledge of the social world as constructed by outside observers and the knowledge used by those who possess a practical mastery of their world" (Postone, LiPuma & Calhoun, 1993, p. 3) by attempting to accord validity to "native" conceptions without simply taking those conceptions at face value. Utilising Bourdieu's theoretical perspective to inform data analysis, then, requires researchers to look at the dynamic interaction between individuals and the surroundings in which they find themselves and situate their accounts within a larger historical, political, economic and symbolic context.

The interview questions over the two year period broadly focused on drawing out teachers' (changing) understandings about (i) the characteristics of a "good" teacher; (ii) the meaning of social justice and socially just classroom practice; and (iii) the ways that

these influence their pedagogy in the classroom. After each round of interviews, audio files were transcribed into textual form within word processing documents. The text was analysed to draw out evidence suggestive of teachers' dispositions towards social justice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The account of disposition espoused by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, forms the basis of the analysis in this article (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990a; 1990b). While recent research in the field has begun to consider dispositions that inform teachers' activities, definitions are contradictory, with disposition variously understood at the level of an individual's character traits, qualities, attitudes, beliefs, values, moral sensibilities and virtues. In contrast, Bourdieu's well known concept of habitus implies habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, as a way of accounting for the fact that there are other principles that generate practices beside rational calculation. It operates below the level of calculation and consciousness, underlying and conditioning and orienting practices by providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives "without consciously obeying rules explicitly posed as such" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 76).

The dispositions (tendencies, propensities or inclinations) that constitute the habitus are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation, making the habitus a complex amalgam of past and present. Described as a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), dispositions orient actors to do certain things in certain

circumstances. Operating as a strategy-generating principle, they enable agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations (Bourdieu, 1977): orienting actions without strictly determining them; acting without strictly thinking about what to do; embodied in habits of mind.

Although dispositions are generally stable, this article argues that the habitus has the potential for transformation. This argument is made in spite of critique that Bourdieu does not give enough credit to agency and the revolutionary potential of agents. According to his critics, his world is far more reproductive than transformative; his social universe “ultimately remains one in which things happen to people, rather than a world in which they can intervene in their individual and collective destinies” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 91). While it is not difficult to understand the critique directed at Bourdieu’s work given the structuralist language and forms of reasoning in some early formulations of habitus (for example, Bourdieu, 1977), some of Bourdieu’s texts provide more space for agency than others. More recent work, such as *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu et al., 1999), is oriented to understanding the effects of “objective relations” in the apparently idiosyncratic and individual; to understand, in other words, “the complexity of interactions between social space/field and habitus” (McLeod, 2005, p. 15).

Dispositional change in teachers is explored in this article through an investigation of this complex relationship between habitus and field. In Bourdieu’s theory of practice, action is constituted through a dialectical relationship between an individual’s habitus and the objective world, or field. Indeed, Bourdieu’s concepts of capital, habitus and

field are all interrelated and relevant here: social practice is a result of the relationship between habitus and capital (any resource that enables one to appropriate the specific profits arising out of participation and contest in a given social arena (Bourdieu, 1986)) as realised within the specific logic of a given field. Together, the concepts of capital, habitus and field, then:

enable us to elucidate cases of reproduction – when social and mental structures are in agreement and reinforce each other – as well as transformation – when discordances arise between habitus and field – leading to innovation, crisis, and structural change. (Wacquant, 1998, p. 223)

As the product of social conditionings, the habitus is not static but can be “endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it, when embodied structures of expectation encounter structures of objective chances in harmony with these expectations, or in a direction that transforms it” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 116).

In identifying teachers’ dispositions towards social justice – which inform their unthinking-ness in action in catering for diversity – the research analyses the data for evidence of three social justice perspectives identified by Gale and Densmore (2000). This should not suggest the absence of alternative suitable conceptual frameworks, but was intentionally selected for (i) its commitment beyond narrow conceptualisations of social justice in an era where liberal-democratic versions of distributive justice are utilised to maintain unjust social arrangements (Gale & Densmore, 2000); and (ii) its

utility in illuminating the (changing) social justice dispositions of the participants. Moreover, while their three social justice perspectives are not mutually exclusive, this article elaborates on and illustrates dimensions of this framework separately for analytical purposes, which may give the impression of more of a “rigid” approach to analysis than is intended.

The most longstanding of these perspectives conceives of social justice as *redistribution*: shifting enough resources/opportunities from advantaged to disadvantaged groups in order to compensate them for their perceived deficits in what are considered to be the basics (e.g., of education). While liberal-democratic forms of redistributive justice (or “simple equality” (Walzer, 1983)) regard all individuals as having the same basic needs, social democratic models of redistributive justice (or complex equality) advocate for the (re)distribution of different social goods for different people (equity). A second conception is of social justice as *retribution*: protection of people, their resources and opportunities, considered the just rewards for their skill and hard work, and penalties for those who seek to unfairly/unlawfully acquire these resources/opportunities by other means. A third conception is of social justice as *recognition*: provision of the means for all people to exercise their capabilities and determine their actions, and to be recognised in these relations for who they are, as they name themselves (Gale & Densmore, 2000, pp.12-19). These perspectives suggest tendencies, inclinations and leanings that guide teacher practice and name the spectrum of teacher social justice dispositions of pedagogic work.

Broadly speaking, distributive and retributive accounts of social justice tend to confine their interests to people's assets – in the form of material and social goods – (or lack thereof) and are only minimally concerned with social processes and procedures that (re)produce those assets. Recognitive justice, informed by the work of Young (1990) and Fraser (1995), rethinks what we mean by social justice and acknowledges the place of social groups within this. This expanded view of social justice includes a positive regard for social difference and the centrality of socially democratic processes in working towards its achievement. In brief, there are three necessary conditions for recognitive justice: the fostering of respect for different social groups through their self-identification; opportunities for their self-development and self-expression; and the participation of groups in making decisions that directly concern them, through their representation on determining bodies (self-determination) (Gale & Densmore, 2000). If there were space to critique a recognitive view of social justice, it is perhaps in its affirmation and recognition rather than critical or transformative engagement of difference. Political philosophers such as Nancy Fraser (1997), for example, challenge us to transcend such recognition and pursue a theory and politics of transformation by engaging with the deep structures that generate injustice.

Combined with the theoretical work of Bourdieu, which is informed by socially critical and poststructural understandings of the world, Gale and Densmore (2000) provide a complementary conceptual framework. Both ask “whose interests are being served and how” (Tripp, 1998, p. 37) in the social arrangements we find, in an attempt to “work towards a more just social order” (Lenzo, 1995, p. 17). Drawing on these conceptual

resources, what follows illustrates and theorises the possibility of dispositional change through a specific focus on two teachers' dispositions toward social justice in relation to how they conceptualise and respond to the needs of students in their classrooms. Implications for pre-service teacher education in relation to the constraints of the limited and limiting nature of practicum placements are discussed.

EXPLORING DISPOSITIONAL CHANGE OVER TIME IN TWO TEACHERS

Joanna was a final year Bachelor of Education student at the time of our first interview. After completing her Bachelor of Education, Joanna relocated from a metropolitan city to a regional centre on the coast, several hours from her home town, to take up employment as a mathematics teacher in a Catholic secondary school. Kristy was beginning her pre-service teacher education as a Graduate Diploma in Education student at the time of the first interview. Upon graduation, she also relocated from a metropolitan city and took up residence in a rural inland centre to begin work as a science teacher in a small State secondary school.

Both Kristy and Joanna (pseudonyms) were aged in their early twenties at the time of their first interviews and identified as English speaking Anglo-Australians. The dispositional change each experienced over time is explored below.

From “It’s not fair on the others” to “I want every child to ... succeed”

At the time of our initial interview, Joanna had just returned from her first practicum placement during her final year of the Bachelor of Education program. Her reflections on

the presence of students with learning difficulties in the classroom during this placement provide an interesting insight into her dispositions towards social justice at that point in time:

There were three or four [students] in my ... class that had learning difficulties. And so the teacher aide would sit with them and that was a huge help ... Because with students of low ability, you tend to spend more time with them and it's not fair on the others. They get forgotten about; you don't get to talk to the others who are doing well. (Joanna, Interview 1)

When we returned to the issue of social justice and what it meant to her later in the interview, Joanna reiterated these beliefs:

I guess [social justice] means giving all students, no matter what their background or financial situation, a fair treatment and ... [spending an] even amount of time with all students and making sure that they all have access to everything ... Just treat them all equally. (Joanna, Interview 1)

In suggesting that spending more time with students who are struggling is not fair on the ones who are doing well, Joanna appears to hold to a liberal democratic form of redistributive justice, which is premised on simple equality. Sometimes referred to as a deficit model of social justice, this perspective regards all individuals as having the same basic needs and views the solution to an equality imbalance as compensating (or

normalising) “disadvantaged individuals by supplying them with basic material and social goods that meet their (dominantly determined) needs” (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 12). The redistribution of different social goods for different people (equity) is shunned in the quest for sameness (equality). Often utilised by individuals to maintain unjust social arrangements, such accounts fall short of delivering social justice.

When Joanna and I met again prior to her graduation from the program, she reflected:

We did stuff at uni[versity] about catering for diversity but on prac[ticum] you’re just trying to get 50% of the class interested ... You’re just establishing yourself and getting used to [teaching] ... It’s more about surviving; just trying to get through it.
(Joanna, Interview 2)

Joanna and I next spoke six months after she took up a full time position as a mathematics teacher in a Catholic secondary school. In discussing her experiences as a beginning teacher, Joanna said:

Probably one of the biggest challenges for me is ... trying to cater for the thirty different kids in my class. They’re all at such different levels ... Being at uni[versity] [I’ve] done all the theory about what we should be doing ... but when it actually comes down to doing it, it’s really difficult. (Joanna, Interview 3)

When asked about her ability to cater for diversity in socially just ways, Joanna acknowledged its importance, but tempered this against the difficulties of doing it well:

I've got to be more aware of the differences in catering for each individual. I'm not quite sure if I do it well ... but I'm definitely more aware of it ... There's such a huge range in learning abilities ... and I'm really struggling with that. I'm aware that I should be catering for all these needs but it's really difficult to do. (Joanna, Interview 3)

Joanna and I met again at the end of her first year of teaching. When questioned about whether catering for diversity in the classroom became easier after completing one year of teaching, Joanna said, "It's still challenging, but a little bit easier ... Towards the end of the year it just became a bit more natural [as you] got to know things that worked and things that didn't" (Interview 4). When we discussed the challenge of teaching students of different ability levels, she said, "As an undergraduate teacher, people said [to me], 'You're gonna have a class of mixed abilities' ... but I didn't realise how hard it was gonna be" (Interview 4).

When asked about what the term social justice meant to her at that point in time, her response mirrored that from our interview six months prior: "It probably hasn't changed. Just making sure each student is listened to and has a voice and is given the things they need and the attention they need" (Joanna, Interview 4). She went on to say, "I want every child to be able to succeed ... I hate seeing kids ... struggling. It really hurts

me ... There must be something that I can do that can make them ... achieve more” (Interview 4).

It is instructive to compare her dispositions towards social justice from Interview 1 (at the beginning of her final year of pre-service teacher education) to Interviews 3 and 4 (the middle and end of her first year of teaching). While Joanna’s reflection is that her perspective “probably hasn’t changed” (Interview 4) over the two year period, dispositional change is evident as she begins to commit to success for all; acknowledging the importance of “catering for each individual” (Interview 3) and focusing on giving students “the things they need and the attention they need” in order that “every child” is “able to succeed” (Interview 4). This contrasts sharply with her earlier suggestions that “it’s not fair on the others” when you “spend more time” with “students of low ability” (Interview 1) and subsequent goal to “[spend an] even amount of time with all students” (Interview 1). This focus on redistribution according to need rather than sameness suggests a move away from a liberal-democratic model and towards a social-democratic or difference model of redistributive justice. Characterised by complex equality (Walzer, 1983), it argues “not just for unequal distributions of social goods but for the distribution of different social goods for different people” (Gale & Densmore, 2000, p. 13).

It is also interesting to note that this dispositional change from a liberal to a social democratic version of redistributive justice appears to take place at the same time that Joanna is developing competence as a beginning teacher. While she spoke as a pre-

service teacher of the difficulties of “just trying to get 50% of the class interested” and focusing on “surviving ... just trying to get through it” (Interview 2), her language shifted as a beginning teacher. After six months of teaching she began to speak about the importance of catering “for the thirty different kids in my class”, although she described it as “probably one of the biggest challenges for me” (Interview 3). Although Joanna concedes that she’s “not quite sure if I do it well”, she’s “definitely more aware of it” (Interview 3). Towards the end of her first year of teaching, she suggested that catering for diversity was “still challenging, but a little bit easier” and something that “just became a bit more natural” as she “got to know things that worked and things that didn’t” (Interview 4).

These are issues that I will return to later.

From “No exceptions; every kid is treated the same” to “Work[ing] through it [to] get a compromise”

When asked what the phrase social justice meant to Kristy during our very first interview (close to the commencement of her year of study in the Graduate Diploma in Education program), she replied, “I haven’t heard that term to be honest” (Kristy, Interview 1). In spite of this, when considering the challenges she may face on her upcoming practicum placement, she expressed awareness of the importance of being inclusive of all learners, albeit uncertain about how she might do this:

I think it's going to be hard to try and plan something that you pitch to all different learning abilities ... I don't know how teachers do it ... How they can teach a concept, like algebra, to a kid who doesn't understand multiplication? ... How do you overcome that? How do you teach the whole class while not leaving that kid out, but not hold the class back because you're trying to help that individual kid? ... I think it's going to be like getting thrown in the deep end; sink or swim. (Kristy, Interview 1)

While acknowledging the importance of catering for students with different learning abilities, she seems to view students who are less successful in the mathematics classroom in deficit terms; offering challenges that need to be overcome. Her concern about “not hold[ing] the class back because you're trying to help that individual kid out” hints at an approach to social justice that is retributive in nature. Such narrow conceptualisations of social justice recognise individual students as deserving and/or being entitled to (or punished with) different opportunities in accordance with their talents (Gale & Densmore, 2000).

Upon graduating from the program, Kristy took up a position as a science teacher in a State secondary school in a rural community. When asked whether her perception of the characteristics of a good teacher had changed since entering the profession six months earlier, she said:

I think you need to be more flexible ... [On] prac[ticum], everyone kept saying, 'stick to your guns' ... And I found that although you do need to stick to what you say, I've been ... a bit more understanding of why [students] act [a certain] way. (Kristy, Interview 3)

In trying to understand broader reasons for students' (mis)behaviour, Kristy reflected:

When you've got kids who ... have behavioural issues, generally ... they have something happening ... outside of school. I'm lucky here ... [As] it is a small community, if one kid has a bad night ... then we're generally told ... And so ... you are a bit more understanding and caring ... I try and ... give them a bit of extra attention to try and get them back on track. (Kristy, Interview 3)

Kristy demonstrates awareness gained through experience that "stick[ing] to your guns" doesn't necessarily enable teachers to be responsive to the circumstances that some of our most disadvantaged students encounter. One rule for all – as touted by advocates of simple equality or a liberal democratic view of redistributive justice – does not enable flexibility to deal with students on a needs basis, and is rejected in favour of a more social democratic view.

By the time of our fourth interview, Kristy had been teaching for one year. When asked about her overall impressions of her first year of teaching, she said, "It was a big

learning curve ... But after ... you've had a bit of experience ... you get used to all the things you've got to do, so it is a bit easier" (Interview 4).

She again mentioned the benefits of having knowledge of students' backgrounds as a result of living within a small community:

If you drive around town you see kids walking the streets at ... night. And when they come to school the next day and they don't have their books ... you can understand why ... It's [these] kids ... that offer challenges in terms of behaviour.
(Kristy, Interview 4)

Kristy reflected on the inadequacy of pre-service teacher education in effectively preparing teachers for such experiences:

At uni[versity] they talk about [what to do] when a kid comes to school and they're [under the influence of drugs] or ... [their] Uncle's been put in jail ... But you don't really see it and you don't really relate to it ... But when you see it ... you can then link it to why they're behaving badly. (Kristy, Interview 4)

She continued:

When they talk about poverty [at university] ... it feels like you're an outsider looking in ... So when I came here, that was the last thing on my mind ... You

come in contact with a kid who is in a situation and you try and help them. It wasn't something that I consciously thought of at all at the start of teaching ... It was more of a learned thing for me because I hadn't really ever been in [that] situation ... before starting teaching. (Kristy, Interview 4)

Kristy makes an important point here: that pre-service teacher education can raise awareness of these issues, but can't necessarily make future teachers "really relate to it" when they are in schools for a limited time for their practicum placements, which can result in them feeling like "an outsider looking in". However, now that she can understand why students may be "behaving badly":

... it makes you feel less inclined to stick to your guns ... As a teacher you're always ... 'stick to your guns, no exceptions, every kid is treated the same' ... [But] when you have a kid who is struggling because of something that's happened outside of school, you ... try and work through it and get a compromise ... rather than just saying, 'this is my law and you will follow it'. (Kristy, Interview 4)

While Kristy was originally torn between philosophies of "every kid is treated the same" versus "pitch[ing] [work] to all different learning abilities" – albeit on the proviso that she "not hold the class back" while "trying to help ... individual[s]" (Interview 1) – her dispositions changed as her experience grew. She began to be "a bit more understanding of why [students are] acting [a certain] way" (Interview 3) and the importance of being "flexible" and "less inclined to stick to your guns" (Interview 4). On

occasions, this entails “work[ing] through it [to] get a compromise” (Interview 4) and giving students “a bit of extra attention to try and get them back on track” (Interview 3). In coming to the realisation that one law for all students constrains responsiveness to individual needs, Kristy moves away from liberal democratic views of redistributive justice and retributive justice and towards social democratic views of redistributive justice.

As was the case with Joanna, this dispositional change appeared to take place concurrent to Kristy’s growing experience as a beginning teacher. While she spoke of “getting thrown in the deep end” and having to “sink or swim” (Interview 1) during her time as a pre-service teacher, towards the end of her first year of teaching Kristy reflected that “after ... you’ve had a bit of experience ... you get used to all the things you’ve got to do ... it is a bit easier” (Interview 4). She acknowledged that her first year of teaching “was a big learning curve”, catering for the different needs of students was “the last thing on [her] mind”; not something that she “consciously thought of at all at the start of teaching” (Interview 4). In her view, then, catering for diversity is “more of a learned thing” where “you come in contact with a kid who is in a situation and you try and help them” (Interview 4).

A BOURDIEUIAN EXPLANATION OF DISPOSITIONAL CHANGE

Interviews with Joanna and Kristy over a two year period provide evidence of change in their dispositions towards social justice. As pre-service teachers, they appeared to be tied to either liberal-democratic models of redistributive justice (premised on simple

equality) or retributive justice (premised on individual students as deserving and/or being entitled to (or punished with) different opportunities in accordance with their talents). By the end of their first year of teaching, there was definite movement towards social-democratic or difference models of redistributive justice (premised on complex equality). Part of this movement entails a growing recognition of the appropriateness of the (re)distribution of different social goods for different people (equity) (where an unequal distribution would contribute to the well-being of those who have unfavourable starting positions) rather than a quest for sameness (equality). In both cases, this dispositional change took place at the same time as Joanna and Kristy were becoming more experienced and competent as beginning teachers.

While this movement is not at all surprising if we begin from a post-structural framework that understands identities as constantly in the act of becoming – that is, they are fluid, dynamic, changing and changeable in different contexts and times rather than fixed and stable (Allard & Santoro, 2006) – the tools of Bourdieu are particularly valuable in helping us to understand this change at a theoretical level.

As a structured space of positions, fields prescribe their particular values and possess their own regulative principles; imposing their specific determinations upon all who enter. Beginning teachers who wish to succeed in their profession, for example, are aided by acquiring the necessary capital and abiding by the rules and regulations enforced by the field (Wacquant, 1998). Teachers whose dispositions towards social justice are not embodied in the school culture are placed at a disadvantage by their very

“proximity to and distance from the present orthodoxy or the legitimate” (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 20). In an (unconscious) attempt for their ways of thinking to more closely approximate that of their respective schools – in terms of a cultural disposition or habitus that resembles the values that their schools legitimate – the teachers discussed within this article move towards values tied to social-democratic versions of redistributive justice. How does this happen?

The habitus provides our teachers with “a ‘feel for the game’, a sense of what is appropriate in the circumstances and what is not” (Thompson, 1991, p. 13); making certain ways of behaving and responding seem natural. While the field offers the individual “a gamut of possible stances and moves that she can adopt” (Wacquant, 1998, p. 222), agents generally play to increase their capital in conformity with the tacit rules of the game (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) in an attempt to produce a situation where habitus and field are compatible or congruent with one another (Thompson, 1991). This attempt will have been realised when agents do no more than “follow their own social ‘nature’” (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 90) to generate practices perfectly adjusted to the field; finding themselves like “fish in water” (Bourdieu, 1990a).

As full time teachers, Joanna and Kristy made sense of the commonly accepted practices in their field in a way that they could not during their (limited and limiting) practicum placements. With discordances evident between their habitus and field, and lacking the necessary capital to play the game to their advantage, they worked (albeit unconsciously) at acquiring the relevant capital to develop a disposition or habitus that

resembles the values that their schools legitimate. As they develop a feel for the game, their dispositions – which inform their unthinking-ness in action in catering for diversity – more closely resemble perspectives tied to social-democratic versions of redistributive justice. With habitus and field compatible, the teachers begin to experience a feeling of being like “fish in water” (Bourdieu, 1990a), where catering for the diverse needs of students in their classrooms is far more natural and automatic: something they are simply disposed to do.

CONCLUSION

While the need for all teachers to better understand and work with difference productively has become increasingly critical, teacher education programs have been largely unsuccessful in their attempts to prepare teachers for catering for such diversity. As pre-service teachers, Joanna and Kristy are typical in this regard: tied to either liberal-democratic models of redistributive justice (premised on simple equality) or retributive justice (premised on individual students as deserving and/or being entitled to (or punished with) different opportunities in accordance with their talents). Such accounts fall short of delivering social justice and can even work to maintain unjust social arrangements.

By the end of their first year as beginning teachers, however, there is evidence that both experienced change in their dispositions towards social justice. There is clear movement towards social-democratic or difference models of redistributive justice (premised on complex equality). Within this movement is a growing recognition of the

appropriateness of the (re)distribution of different social goods for different people (equity) rather than a quest for sameness (equality). This dispositional change took place at the same time as Joanna and Kristy were developing competence as beginning teachers.

Drawing on the theoretical tools of Bourdieu, this change has been theorised as being closely related to an initial incongruence or dissonance between habitus and field and (unconscious) efforts by Joanna and Kristy to acquire the relevant capital to develop a habitus that resembles the values that their schools legitimate. As they develop a feel for the game as teachers and their habitus and field becomes more compatible, their dispositions – which inform their unthinking-ness in action in catering for diversity – more closely resemble perspectives tied to social-democratic versions of redistributive justice. As they become disposed to do certain things in certain circumstances, catering for the diverse needs of students in the classroom becomes far more natural and automatic; much like the experience of being a “fish in water” (Bourdieu, 1990a).

Implicit in this theorisation is the suggestion that pre-service teachers may experience considerable difficulty making sense of commonly accepted practices in the field during practicum placements that are limited and limiting in nature. Indeed, dispositions – including dispositions towards social justice – that constitute one’s habitus are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation. If we consider Bourdieu’s observation that the acquisition of cultural capital involves, amongst other things, extended periods of time

with those who are themselves endowed with “strong” cultural capital, moving beyond the superficial treatment of social justice and diversity takes on a new significance.

Given that the accumulation process is time-intensive, it would appear that practicum placements that are limited in terms of length and limiting in terms of scope do not lend themselves to endowing our pre-service teachers either with legitimate cultural capital or the disposition to make use of it (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) and therefore need to be seriously reconsidered. However, as Australian researcher Jennifer Gore (2001) argues, “more field experience in and of itself is not necessarily better for preservice teachers” (p. 126). Radical reconsideration and subsequent restructure of practicum – which could involve (i) a much closer relationship between coursework and practicum and an ongoing analysis of and reflection on how theory plays out in the classroom with regard to diversity; (ii) working with supervising teachers to help pre-service teachers grapple with questions raised by diversity; and (iii) a longer practicum component with a sustained emphasis throughout on teaching diverse students – is essential if our hope is for teachers to graduate prepared for the challenges of catering for diversity in socially just ways.

In addition, it could be argued that care must be taken in arranging practicum placements with supervising teachers whose dispositions are reflective of those we wish to see in our future teachers. While there would be logistical obstacles to implementing such an approach, if we are to take seriously the goal of graduating teachers with

dispositions enabling them to teach diverse student populations well, it is a strategy well worth our consideration.

There are, of course, many factors in the lives of Joanna and Kristy that could potentially have shaped their dispositions towards social justice. While this article is not suggesting that practicum placements are the only way to transform the thinking of pre-service teachers, it *does* suggest that pre-service teacher education can do more in supporting educators like Kristy and Joanna to move towards recognitive views of social justice.

As a final note, while social-democratic versions of redistributive justice are not necessarily considered to be ideal, it is the change over time towards more desirable notions of social justice that is of interest here. While further movement towards recognitive justice may be possible over time, it is the increasing focus on democracy in these early career teachers as “both an element and a condition of social justice” (Young, 1990, p. 91) that should be commended here.

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